

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS COLLECTIONS POLICY STATEMENTS

SUPPLEMENTARY GUIDELINES

Independently Published and Self-Published Textual Materials

Contents

- I. Introduction
- II. Definitions
- III. Diverse and Inclusive Collecting Statement
- IV. Previously Overlooked Sources
- V. Current Guidelines
- VI. Poetry and Literature

Preface

This document provides guidance to Library of Congress staff regarding: (a) the dramatic increase of self-published works as a significant portion of and change in the book publishing industry, and (b) the acquisition of independent (indie) and self-published materials. In this document, the term self-published will be understood to include independent or indie publishing. This document applies only to textual works, and not to non-textual works such as sound recordings or moving images.

History

Self-publishing was a common method of publishing in the 19th century, with authors paying all costs, or publishers asking for subsidies to produce books by new authors or with little apparent commercial value. In 1916 *Publishers' Weekly* wrote that the practice was still common, because worthy books with limited appeal needed financial assistance from the author to be published. However, within the next decades, self-publishing had acquired a stigma and a pejorative name: vanity publishing or vanity press.

With the advent of the Internet in the 1990s, circumstances were advantageous for changes to the traditional vs. vanity publishing model. Not only did the Internet allow for democratization of information dissemination in general, but specific technologies and subsequent services were developed such as POD (print-on-demand), self-publishing platforms, and hybrid publishers, all of which are contemporary forms of independent publishing. Self-publishing grew along with the development of the e-book and the Internet. By 2016 the self-publishing industry had grown so significantly that an estimated 700,000 or more titles were being published each year. Almost 20% of self-published books appear only in digital format, although some authors also provide print or POD.¹

The emergent technologies have brought revised definitions and terminology to the publishing arena.

¹ <http://media.bowker.com/documents/bowker-selfpublishing-report2016.pdf>

For example, the term vanity press, still highly pejorative, has contracted in use to refer more often to specific disreputable publishers or deceptive practices, rather than being the overall term for self-publishing. New terms have gained currency or expanded in meaning as new authors and services overtake the arena. Independent, or indie, publishing is the most neutral and overarching term for this new publishing situation. Although with both the terminology and the publishing industry in flux, self-publishing as a term and a process still has an associated stigma. However, as more and more people, especially younger digital natives, participate in the process as readers or authors, the stigma declines. As such, the Library of Congress has developed the following guidelines for collection development of self-published materials.

I. Introduction

Self-published materials constitute a universe of works for which the author handles all the logistical aspects and expenses of publication. This is in sharp contrast to traditional commercial publishing, where the publisher assumes both the expense and the financial risk of publication. The term self-publishing is often broadly interpreted and is frequently used generically to include various publishing models where the author manages all the aspects of publication and the array of other publishing options that fall under the “author pays” model, such as vanity imprints, print on demand, independent (indie) publishing, etc. Such publishers frequently provide services for a fee, often bundled into packages for the consumer, or they refer authors to various services, such as layout, formatting, proofreading, editing, design, and illustration. In some instances, authors may pay for these services themselves; in others they may use crowdsourcing to raise the necessary revenue. In some countries, due to an underdeveloped commercial publishing industry or other unique circumstances, the “author pays” model, or a version of it, may be more common than traditional commercial publishing.

One major point of differentiation between self-publishing and traditional commercial publishing involves editing. Traditional commercial or “mainstream” publishers usually maintain full editorial control, including the option of total rejection of a prospective work. Such publishers can therefore be said to exercise a juried editorial process with regard to manuscript submission. With the various forms of self-publishing, editing may be contracted out, may be under the total control of the author, or may be absent from the process.

Editorial services offered to self-publishers may include, as part of the publishing package, any of the following: substantive or structural editing (clarifying and/or reorganizing a manuscript for content and structure), stylistic editing (clarifying meaning), copy editing (for grammar, spelling, punctuation and other mechanics of style), and rewriting (creating a new manuscript or parts of a manuscript on the basis of content and research supplied by an author. This may also include some research and writing of original material).

On the other hand, editorial services for self-publishers may also be highly limited, if offered at all. Many authors who self-publish are inexperienced in numerous aspects of publishing. Other authors who self-publish may not purchase editorial and formatting services. This, in some cases, results in a product that may look unpolished and less commercially appealing. While it retains the author’s voice, it also retains the original unedited text.

The lines between traditional publishing and self-publishing have been blurred in recent years and the number of self-published books has exploded. Self-publishing is an important outlet for the stories of ordinary people and reflects the voices of these multiple cultures, struggles, and experiences. Self-published books can be excellent primary source material. Self-publishing is also a significant mode used by independent authors and scholars, organizations, clubs, societies, and other groups. Self-publishing provides a valuable and often irreplaceable window into political, social, and economic movements and into popular culture.

II. Definitions

Hybrid publishing: A variant publishing model that stresses a cooperative publishing and business relationship between author and publisher. Hybrid publishers frequently offer limited editorial services and often require authors to handle promotion, distribution, and other logistical aspects related to publication in exchange for a profit sharing agreement.

Indie publishing: A variant publishing model that stresses independence from large publishing houses and focuses on the inclusion of newcomers. Indie publishers frequently utilize publishing aspects of the hybrid publishing model such as the author/publisher cooperative relationship and profit sharing.

Print on Demand: A variant publishing format frequently based upon the “author pays” publishing model. Print on Demand (POD) usually involves printing only those copies that are ordered for purchase; therefore, unlike traditional or other self-publishing models, no physical copies exist in a warehouse.

Self-Publishing: The publishing of a book, serial, or other media without the assistance of an established publisher and at the author’s expense. The author is responsible not only for writing the work, but for all logistical aspects of production, including layout, design, printing, marketing, distribution, and ISBN acquisition, as well as all deposit requirements associated with LCCN assignment and copyright registration. All rights to copyright are held by the author.

Vanity publishing: A publishing model where a publishing house charges a fee to publish an author’s work. Vanity imprints frequently offer publishing packages which may include a variety of editorial and production services of varying quality. Unlike true self-publishing, the author does not own the complete print run of the finished titles.

III. Diverse and Inclusive Collecting Statement

As the nation’s de facto national library, the Library of Congress strives to build an expansive, yet selective, collection that records the creativity of the United States and is reflective of the nation’s diversity and complexity. The Library’s mandate is to have collections that are inclusive and representative of a diversity of creators and ideas. A priority includes acquiring material of underrepresented perspectives and voices in the Library’s collections to ensure diverse authorship, points of view, cultural identities, and other historical or cultural factors. The Library also seeks to build

a research collection that comprises a globally representative sample of international materials that are diverse in voice and perspective, relative to their places of origin, further supporting the Library's mission to sustain and preserve a universal collection of knowledge and creativity for Congress and future generations.

Diverse collecting is mentioned within many of the Library's Collections Policy Statements. In addition, the Library has adopted several specific collection policies in an effort to ensure it is building an inclusive and representative collection. For more information, see the Library's Collections Policy Statements on [Ethnic Materials](#), [LGBTQIA+ Studies](#), [Women's and Gender Studies](#), [Independently Published and Self-Published Textual Materials](#), and [Countries and Regions with Acquisitions Challenges](#).

IV. Previously Overlooked Sources

Self-published material has historically come into the Library via established channels, yet, for whatever reason, some publishers of controversial content or content produced by and for minority communities may not have been sending their publications via Copyright or as gifts. The Library is interested in acquiring publications of specific groups or communities which have been overlooked, some of which are mentioned below. Recommending Officers are encouraged to widen the circle, to look beyond the types of material that come to the Library routinely, and to consider a wider variety of material for inclusion in the collections. However, as the universe of self-published materials, both analog and digital, has exploded and continues to grow, Recommending Officers must be selective and exercise judgment in their recommendations.

The Library's collections and selection policies should include self-published monographs, newspapers or serials, pamphlets or booklets, ephemera, and e-publication formats. These non-mainstream publications may be works produced in urban, regional, or rural communities and by various ethnic, religious, and intentional communities. Many American minority communities tend to primarily use self-publishing as the means to document their cultural experience in the United States. Each of these diverse communities represents a segment of America's rich cultural diversity; their lives, culture, heritage, contributions, and integration into the American mainstream and consciousness must be documented through active selection and collection of their self-published works.

Examples of groups that are underrepresented by mainstream publishing houses, and thus often turn to self-publishing:

- People of Color (African Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and Spanish-speaking Americans)
- Immigrants to the U.S. who write in their native languages or in English
- The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community
- Non-mainstream religious communities
- Political dissidents
- Fraternal organizations
- Cults

The self-published material of similar communities and organizations in foreign countries should also be considered for recommendation.

V. Current Guidelines

The Library currently acquires self-published titles in the following areas:

- All genealogies
- All local histories
- All veterans' histories war memoirs and other personal accounts of wars or military campaigns
- Authors who have been previously published by the mainstream publishing world (fiction and non-fiction) and who self-publish
- Authors who publish works of local or regional interest concerning the metropolitan Washington D.C., area
- Authors who publish works of quality demonstrating a unique perspective or in-depth knowledge of a particular geographic region of the United States
- Authors who publish works of quality demonstrating a unique perspective or in-depth knowledge of a particular geographic region of the World
- Authors who self-publish works of quality that demonstrate in-depth knowledge and unique expertise in a particular subject area
- Comic books
- Cookbooks and recipe books
- Dissidents' memoirs; those fleeing or living under oppression
- Immigrant stories/memoirs
- Personal narratives of quality that relate firsthand knowledge or a unique historical perspective about a particular historical era
- Refugee stories/memoirs
- Self-published materials in lesser known languages which may be of value in language preservation and revitalization (For guidance in recommending material in lesser known languages, please see the Supplementary Guidelines for Lesser Known Languages)
- Self-published materials in Native American and indigenous languages of the Americas
- Self-published military histories, including histories of underreported wars or military campaigns, of quality Self-published works of current or former Library of Congress employees
- Self-published works of fiction or poetry that are award winners
- Self-published works of quality authored by individuals who work in the professions: government, business, the sciences, the arts, academia, media, sports, entertainment (these are usually people of accomplishment who are documenting their careers or who have a unique story that only they can tell)
- True crime
- Witnesses to, or participants in, historic events

Special attention can be paid to books not widely held by academic institutions in the United States.

Special attention can also be paid to the following subject areas and formats when they document and preserve the existence and cultures of groups underrepresented by mainstream publishing houses:

- Autobiographies and memoirs
- Biographies
- Children’s books
- Directories of Communities and/or Organizations
- Manifestos/Political Materials
- Proceedings of Organizations
- Music/Film
- Zines (a self-published, limited run, non-commercial, often homemade or online publication usually devoted to specialized and often unconventional subject matter)

VI. Poetry and Literature

Literary works—including poetry, novels, drama, and criticism—constitute a significant portion of self-published materials that come into the Library. Recommending Officers should consult the following guidelines, which augment the Library’s Collections Policy Statement for [Literature and Language \(Classes P-PZ and Sections of Class Z\)](#), when considering self-published poetry and literature materials for inclusion in the collections.

The CPS statement for [Literature and Language \(Classes P-PZ and Sections of Class Z\)](#) describes the Library’s current policy for acquiring self-published works of poetry and literature:

While works of American popular literature are collected, vanity press and self-published works generally are not collected. Major exceptions include communities underrepresented by the traditional commercial publishing industry. Examples of groups that are underrepresented by mainstream publishing houses, and thus often turn to self-publishing, include:

- People of Color (African Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and Spanish-speaking Americans)
- Immigrants to the U.S. who write in their native languages or in English
- The LGBTQIA+ community
- Non-mainstream religious communities
- Political dissidents
- Fraternal organizations
- Cults

The self-published material of similar communities and organizations in other countries should also be considered for recommendation.

The Library does not acquire most self-published works of literature for its permanent collections. In addition to the exceptions noted above, Recommending Officers and selection officials may select self-published literary works for the Library's permanent collections that meet any of the following criteria:

- The self-published work is written by an author with at least one traditional commercially published work
- The self-published work is subsequently published, in a new edition, by a traditional commercial publisher
- The self-published work has garnered a significant readership (determined by sales rankings, bestseller lists, and other criteria deemed appropriate by Recommending Officers)
- The self-published work is of demonstrable literary merit or captures the expressions of an underrepresented culture or community (determined by review sources, nomination for literary awards, and other criteria deemed appropriate by Recommending Officers)

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